

Human Services Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

H.B. 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced, marginalized women and girls. For nearly fifty years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policies that advance the economic security of women across our state and promote gender equity.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support House Bill 6616: *An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status*.

Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right and no one should be denied health care due to inability to pay or immigration status. In the last two years, Connecticut's state legislature has taken steps to expand access to HUSKY to children ages 0-12 years, because they know that ensuring access to healthcare is essential. Although these steps were made in the right direction, the gaps that have been created since then add overwhelming burdens for many families in the state.

CWEALF's Legal Education program serves over 1,000 clients per year, the majority of which are low-income women of color with one dependent. Some of the clients we serve are undocumented and come to us with questions about housing, workplace issues, their immigration status, and more. Since many of them are parents, some of our clients who are undocumented will be faced with the challenges of having their children grow out of the program and become uninsured again once they hit the age of thirteen. Others will have to deal with the reality of having only some of their children insured through the HUSKY program, and others uninsured due to their age.

Although we stand in support of H.B. 6616 to expand access to the HUSKY healthcare program to folks up to the age of 26, our long-term commitment is to continue fighting to ensure that all immigrants, including parents and adults, have access to the healthcare they need, because healthy kids need healthy families. This in turn, would serve as an investment in the future of Connecticut and will substantially reduce healthcare costs for all members of our state.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the issues our clients face on a daily basis, and even though we are recovering from the pandemic, many families are still experiencing its long-lasting effects. If we want Connecticut to fully recover from COVID-19, we must work to center inclusive and equitable initiatives in how we move forward, especially when focusing on

preventative measures to make sure we can keep our communities safe and healthy should the unimaginable happen again.

The current law is inequitable and can cause more harm for families down the road. Our work should not end with expanding access up to the age of 26; in the long term, we need to ensure that all immigrants, including adults, are given access to HUSKY health insurance and the healthcare that they need and deserve as members of our communities. If we want a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving, and growing workforce and economy, Connecticut must ensure that undocumented folks up to age 26 have access to health coverage.

We urge the Committee to vote favorably in support of House Bill 6616 to continue the conversation towards health insurance for all. No parent should be forced to choose between accessing the care their children need and paying their rent or putting food on the table. It is critical that we address the inequities of healthcare accessibility and its negative effects on all of its residents. H.B. 6616 is an essential step towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering consequences, as well as the creation of a healthier and more equitable Connecticut.